Number Eight.

# WHAT A CURSE!

OR

# JOHNNY HODGES,

THE

# BLACKSMITH.

FOUNDED ON FACT.

Eighth Thousand.

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# TO THE READER.

CAN nothing be DONE to put an end to the evils of intemperance? Such, at the present day, is a very common interrogatory; not from those alone, at the heart of whose domestic happiness this canker-worm is already at work; not from those alone, who have lived in unpardonable ignorance of all, that has been so happily accomplished; but from the most enlightened friends of temperance, who keep the run and the record of its way; who study this deeply-interesting subject, as they study a science; and who, at the same time, are not so blindly in love with a favorite scheme of consummation, as to forget that no remedy for moral evil can be effectual, which is calculated to produce a greater mischief in one direction, than it proposes to remove in another.

Can nothing be DONE, say they, to remove these evils of intemperance? — Have those eight thousand societies, which are said to exist in the United States, *done* nothing? Undoubtedly they have exerted a benign and blessed influence, upon the hearts of many thousands, who have been persuaded to

subscribe the pledge;—still farther, they have operated most happily upon many more, who, for some reason or other, have withheld their hands from the pledge, but who have become respectable temperance men, in word and in deed.—And has not something been DONE?—*Nothing* for *me* and for *mine*, says the poor widow. I have but one son; he will *not* subscribe the pledge; and he *will* drink ardent spirit; and the rum-seller will sell it; and he says it is lawful, and that therefore it is right. My son is a drunkard. I brought him into life; I nursed him and reared him with care; I have watched over him in sickness; I have pinched and spared, that he might be better clothed and better fed than myself; and I am now the heart-broken mother of a thankless child. Societies have undoubtedly been useful to *the world;* but they have *done* nothing for *me.* Cannot something be DONE to save the last hope of a poor widow?

And has nothing been *done*, by that multiplying engine, which, for years, has been employed in scattering, over the surface of the earth, journals and magazines, tracts and tales; and irrigating the moral world, as it were, with refreshing and invigorating showers?—It may be so, says the miserable, broken-spirited wife; but I am sure it has *done* nothing for *me.* I am a drunkard's wife; such, for years of bitterness, I have lived; such, I doubt not, I shall die. I gave to a faithless promiser a devo-

ted heart, and my humble store of worldly goods; he has broken the one and wasted the other. The press may send forth its legion of messengers; but he will not read one of them all; and, should he find one in my hands, he would hurl it into the fire, as he has done before. My children are beggars; my spirit is gone; and, as I rock my child in its cradle, by the fading embers of a midnight fire, wating for the return of a drunken tyrant, I say within my wretched heart, in the language of Job, I would not live always! Cannot something be DONE to stay this desolating plague?

And has not something been *done* by thousands of lectures and addresses, gratuitously delivered, and, of course, open to all?—Beyond all doubt, says the agonized father; but they have no power over my domestic affliction. My son is a drunkard. He will not go and listen to such things. I fear nothing will be DONE. We may lecture, and write, and associate; but nothing will be DONE to reach a case of misery like mine. I had once some hope, that the legislature would afford relief. But what is a legislature? I have taken some pains to analyze the mass, and examine its elements. We are a government of *the people*. If a majority of *the people* are for Juggernaut, and the idol's temples are in danger from legislative interference, the majority of *the people* will take care, that a majority of the legislature shall be the friends and worship-

pers of Juggernaut. Can a rum-selling legislator be expected to legislate against rum! Contemplate the tavern-keepers, retailers, grocers, distillers, and importers in a legislature; add to this list that indifferent and movable body, so easily won over to either side; swell the catalogue, by the addition of every temperate drinker; and, last of all, annex the names of the *base unknown*, those fourteen shameless men, who voted for a notorious infidel, as the Chaplain of the House of Representatives, in this ancient Commonwealth; look, for a moment, at the aggregate, and then repeat the interrogatory;—Will any thing be DONE to put an end to the evils of intemperance?—The only profitable reply to this inquiry must come, in God's good time, from a legislative majority of COLD-WATER MEN.

# WHAT A CURSE!

OR

## JOHNNY HODGES, THE BLACKSMITH.

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"THE doctor is a kind man," said Johnny Hodges, addressing a person of respectable appearance, who was in the act of returning to his pocket-book a physician's bill, which the blacksmith did not find it convenient to pay. "The doctor is a kind man, a very kind man, and has earned his money, I dare say, and I don't begrudge him a shilling of it all; but, for all that, I have not the means of paying his bill, nor any part of it, just now." —"Well, well," said the collector, "I shall be this way before long, and will call on you again."

Johnny Hodges thanked him for the indul-

gence, and proceeded with his work; but the hammer swung heavily upon the anvil, and many a long sigh escaped, before the job in hand was fairly turned off.

Three or four times already, the collector had paid a visit at the blacksmith's shop, who was always ready to admit the justice of the claim, and that the doctor had been very kind and attentive, and had well earned his money; but Johnny was always behindhand; and, though full of professions of gratitude to the good doctor, yet the doctor's bill seemed not very likely to be paid. Familiarity, saith the proverb, breeds contempt. This old saw is not apt to work more roughly, in any relation of life, than between the creditor, or the creditor's agent, and the non-performing debtor. The pursuing party is apt to become importunate, and the pursued to grow gradually callous and indifferent. Upon the present occasion, however, the collector, who was a benevolent man, was extremely patient and forbearing. He had sufficient penetration to perceive, that poor Johnny, for some

cause or other, was always exceedingly mortified and pained, by these repeated applications. It did not, however, escape the suspicion of the collector, that there might be a certain, secret cause, for Johnny's inability to pay the doctor's bill. Intemperance is exhibited, in a great variety of modifications. While some individuals are speedily roused into violent and disorderly action, or hushed to slumber, and reduced to the condition of a helpless and harmless mass; others, provided by nature with heads of iron and leathern skins, are equally intemperate, yet scarcely, for many years, present before the world the slightest personal indication of their habitual indulgence.

Johnny Hodges was an excellent workman, and he had abundance of work. It was not easy to account for such an appropriation of his earnings, as would leave him not enough for the payment of the doctor's bill, upon any other supposition, than that of a wasteful and sinful employment of them, for the purchase of strong drink. Johnny's countenance,

to be sure, was exceedingly pale and sallow; but the pale-faced tippler is, by no means, an uncommon spectacle. On the other hand, Johnny was very industrious, constantly in his shop in working hours, and always busily employed.

After an interval of several weeks, the collector called again, and put the customary question, "Well, Mr. Hodges, can you pay the doctor's bill?" Perhaps there was something unusually hurried or importunate, or Johnny so thought, in the manner of making the inquiry. Johnny was engaged in turning a shoe, and he hammered it entirely out of shape. He laid down his hammer and tongs, and, for a few seconds, rested his cheek upon his hand.—"I don't know how I can pay the doctor's bill," said Johnny Hodges. "I've nothing here in the shop, but my tools and a very little stock; and I've nothing at home, but the remainder of our scanty furniture. I know the doctor's bill ought to be paid, and if he will take it, he shall be welcome to our cow, though I

have five little children, who live upon the milk."—"No, no, Hodges," said the collector, "you are much mistaken, if you suppose the doctor, who is a Christian and a kind-hearted man, would take your cow, or oppress you at all, for the amount of his bill. But how is it, that you, who have always so much work, have never any money."—"Ah, sir," said Johnny Hodges, while he wiped the perspiration from his face, for he was a hard-working man; "Ah, sir," said he, "what a curse it is!—can nothing be done to put a stop to this intemperance? I hear a great deal of the efforts, that are making; but still the rum business goes on. If it were not for the temptations to take strong drink, I should do well enough; and the good doctor should not have sent twice for the amount of his bill. Very few of those, who write and talk so much of intemperance, know any thing of our trials and troubles."—"I confess," said the collector, "that I have had my suspicions and fears before.—Why do you not resolve, that you will never touch another

drop? Go, Hodges, like a man, and put your name to the pledge; and pray God to enable you to keep it faithfully." — "Why, as to that, sir," said the blacksmith, "the pledge will do me no good; the difficulty doesn't lie there.—What a curse!—Is there no prospect of putting an end to intemperance?"—"To be sure there is," replied the collector. "If people will sign the pledge, and keep it too, there is no difficulty."—"But, suppose they will not sign the pledge," rejoined Johnny Hodges, "still, if rum were not so common as it is, and so easily obtained, the temptation would be taken away."—"That is all very true, but it is every man's duty to do something for himself," replied the collector. "I advise you to sign the pledge, as soon as possible." —"Why, sir," said the blacksmith, "the difficulty doesn't lie there, as I told you; I signed the pledge long ago, and I have kept it well. I never was given to taking spirit in my life. My labor at the forge is pretty hard work, yet I take nothing stronger, for

drink, than cold water."—"I am sorry, that I misunderstood you," replied the collector. "But, since you do not take spirit, and your children, as you have led me to suppose, are of tender years; why are you so anxious for the suppression of intemperance."—"Because," said poor Johnny Hodges, after a pause, and with evident emotion, "to tell you the plain truth, it has made my home a hell, my wife a drunkard, and my children beggars! Poor things," said he, as he brushed away the tears, "they have no mother any more. The old cow, that I offered you, just now, for the doctor's debt,—and I believe it would have broken their hearts to have parted with old Brindle,—is more of a mother to them now, than the woman who brought them into this world of trouble. I have little to feed old Brindle with; and the children are running here and there, for a little swill and such matters, to keep her alive. Even the smallest of these poor things will pick up a bunch of hay or a few scattered corn-stalks, and fetch it to her, and look on with delight,

to see her enjoy it. I have seen them all together, when their natural mother, in a drunken spree, has driven them out of doors, flying for refuge to the old cow, and lying beside her in the shed. — What a curse it is!

"What will become of them and of me," continued this broken-hearted man, "I cannot tell. I sometimes fear, that I shall lose my reason, and be placed in the madhouse. Such is the thirst of this wretched woman for rum, that she has repeatedly taken my tools, and carried them five or six miles, and pawned or sold them for liquor. The day before yesterday, I carried home a joint of meat for dinner. When I went home, tired and hungry, at the dinner hour, I found her drunk and asleep upon the floor. She had sold the joint of meat, and spent the money in rum. It's grievous to tell such matters to a stranger, but I can't bear that you or the good doctor should think me ungrateful any longer. I never shall forget the doctor's kindness to me, two years ago, when I had my dreadful

fever; and, if ever I can get so much money together, he shall certainly be paid. That fever was brought on, partly by hard work, but the main spring of the matter was in the mind. My wife was then getting very bad, and when she was in liquor, her language was both indecent and profane; though, when we were married, there wasn't a more modest girl in the parish. Just before my fever came on, in one of her fits of intemperance, she strolled away, and was gone three days and three nights; and, to this hour, I have never known where she was, all that time. It almost broke my heart. The doctor always said there was something upon my mind; but I never told him, nor any one else, the cause of my trouble till now. What a curse!—Don't you think, sir, that something can be done to put an end to this terrible curse of intemperance?"—"Your case is a very hard one," said the collector, after a solemn pause, "and I wish I could point out a remedy. You need give yourself no uneasiness about the doctor's bill, for

I am sure he will think no more of it, when I have told him your story. If it would not give you too much pain, and take up too much of your time, I should like to be informed, a little more particularly, of the commencement and progress of this habit in your wife, which seems to have destroyed your domestic happiness."—Johnny Hodges wiped his brow, and sat down upon a bench in his shop, and the collector took a seat by his side.

"Eight years ago," said Johnny Hodges, "come the first day of next month, I was married. Polly Willson, that was her maiden name, was twenty-three, and I was four years older. I certainly thought it the best day's work I ever did, and I continued of that mind, for about five years. Since then Heaven knows I have had reason to think otherwise; for, ever since, trouble has been about my path, and about my bed. About three years ago, my wife took to drink. I cannot tell how it happened; but she always said, herself, that the first drop of gin she

ever drank, was upon a washing day, when an old Scotch woman persuaded her, that it would keep the cold off her stomach. From that time, the habit grew upon her very fast. She has told me an hundred times, in her sober moments, that she would give the world to leave it off, but that she could not, for the life of her. So strong has been her desire to get liquor, that nothing was safe from her grasp. She has sold her children's Sabbath clothes and my own, for rum. After I had gotten well of my fever, I worked hard; and, at one time, had laid by nearly enough, as I supposed, to pay the doctor's bill. One day, I had received a dollar for work, and went to my drawer, to add it to the rest; and—all was gone! The drawer had been forced open. She knew that I had been saving the money to pay the doctor and the apothecary, for their services, during my fever; she knew that my sickness had been produced by sleepless nights and a broken heart, on her account; yet she could not resist the temptation. She affirmed, in

the most solemn manner, that sne knew nothing about it; but two of the little children, in answer to my inquiry, told me, that they had seen mammy break open the drawer, and take out the money; and that she went directly over to the grocery, and in about half an hour, after she returned, went to sleep so soundly in her chair, that they could not wake her up, to get them a little supper. At that time, I went to Mr. Calvin Leech, the grocer, and told him, that I wondered, as he was a church member, how he could have the heart to ruin the peace of my family. He was very harsh, and told me, that every man must take care of his own wife, and that it was not his business to look after mine. I began to think, with Job, that I would not live always. Strange fancies came into my head about that time, and I tried hard to think of some escape from such a world of sin and sorrow; but a kind and merciful God would not let me take my own wild way. I read my Bible; and the poor children kept all the while in my way

smiling sweetly in my face, and driving all evil thoughts from my mind. My oldest boy was then about seven. "Don't take on so, daddy," the little fellow used to say, when he found me shedding tears, "don't cry, daddy; I shall be big enough to blow the bellows, next year." I have tried to keep up, for the sake of these poor children; and few would be better, for their years, if their mother did not teach some of them to curse and swear. They have the same bright look and gentle temper, that my wife had, when we were married. There never was a milder temper than Polly's, before this curse fell upon the poor creature. Oh, sir, it is nothing but rum, that has ruined our hopes of happiness in this world. How strange it is, that nothing can be *done* to stay such a dreadful plague!"

The collector shook the poor blacksmith by the hand, and bade him keep up his spirits, as well as he could, and put his trust in God's providence. Promising to make

him a friendly call, in the course of a few days, he took his leave.

This interview, with the blacksmith, had caused his visitor to contemplate the subject of the temperance reform, somewhat in a novel point of view. The importunate and frequently repeated interrogatory of Johnny Hodges, "*Cannot something be* DONE *to put an end to the evils of intemperance?*" to most individuals, would appear to savor of gross ignorance, in the inquirer, as to those amazing efforts, which have already been made, at home and abroad. But it must not be forgotten, that poor Hodges was no *theorizer*, in that department of domestic wretchedness, which arises from intemperance. He was well aware, that a prodigious effort had been made, for the purification of the world, by voluntary associations, adopting the pledge of total abstinence. He perfectly understood, that all those, who had subscribed such a pledge, and faithfully adhered to it, were safe from the effects of intemperance,

in their own persons. Yet this poor fellow cried aloud, out of the very depths of his real misery, "*Cannot something be* DONE *to put an end to the evils of intemperance?*" His own bitter experience had taught him, that there was one person who could never be prevailed upon to sign the pledge; one, upon whose faithful execution of her domestic duties, his whole earthly happiness depended; the partner of his bosom; the mother of his children; and she had become a loathsome and ungovernable drunkard. He rationally inferred, indeed he well knew the fact, from his own observation upon the surrounding neighborhood, that such an occurrence was not of an uncommon character. Intemperate husbands, intemperate wives, and intemperate children were all around him. Johnny Hodges was a man of good common sense. He reasoned forward to the future from the past. He entertained no doubt, that, notwithstanding the most energetic, voluntary efforts of all the societies upon the face of the earth, drunkenness would certainly con-

tinue, in a greater or less degree, so long as the means of drunkenness were suffered to remain. The process of reasoning in Johnny's mind may be very easily described. So long, thought he, as rum-selling continues to be sanctioned by law, and grog-shops are legalized, at every corner; so long as even deacons and church members distil rum, and sell it, reducing the temperate drinker's noble to the drunkard's nine-pence, and that nine-pence to nothing and a jail; winning away the bread from the miserable tippler's children; and causing the husband and wife to hate and abhor the very presence of each other; so long a very considerable number of persons, who will not sign the pledge, will be annually converted from temperate men and women, into drunken vagabonds and paupers. The question is therefore reduced to this; Can no effectual measures be provided by law, to prevent a cold, calculating, mercenary body of men from trafficking any longer, in broken hopes, broken hearts, and broken constitutions; and to restrain, at least,

deacons and church members, who pray to the Lord to lead them not into temptation, from laying snares, along the highways and hedges of the land, to entrap the feet of their fellow creatures, and tempt their weaker brethren to their ruin?

A month or more had passed away, before the collector's business brought him again into the neighborhood of the blacksmith's shop. Johnny Hodges was at work as usual. He appeared dejected and care-worn. His visitor shook him by the hand, and told him, that the doctor said he should consider him, as old Boerhaave used to say, one of his best patients, for God would be his paymaster. "Never think of the debt any more, Johnny," said the collector. "The doctor has sent you his bill receipted; and he bade me tell you, that if a little money would help you in your trouble, you should be heartily welcome to it."* "Indeed," said the blacksmith, "the doctor is a kind friend; but I suppose nothing can be done to put an end to this curse?"—"I fear there will not be,

at present," said the collector: "rum is the idol of the people. The friends of temperance have petitioned the legislature to pull this old idol down. Now there are, in that very body, a great many members, who love the idol dearly; there are many, who are sent thither expressly to keep the idol up. So you see, that petitioning the legislature, such as it now is, to abolish the traffic in rum, is like petitioning the priests of Baal to pull down their false god. But you look pale and sad: has any new trouble come upon you, or do you find the old one more grievous to bear?"—"Ah, sir," said this man of many woes, "we have had trouble enough, new and old, since you were here last. Intemperance must be a selfish vice, I am sure. About a fortnight ago, my wife contrived, while I was gone to the city to procure a few bars of iron, to sell our old cow to a drover; and this woman, once so kind-hearted and thoughtful of her children would see them starve, rather than deprive herself of the means of intoxication. She

has been in liquor every day since. But all this is nothing compared with our other late trial. Last Monday night, I was obliged to be from home, till a very late hour. I had a promise from a neighbor to sit up at my house, till my return, to look after the children, and prevent the house from being set on fire. But the promise was forgotten. When I returned, about eleven o'clock, all was quiet. I struck a light, and, finding my wife was in bed, and sound asleep, I looked round for the children. The four older children I readily found, but little Peter, our infant, about thirteen months old, I could find no where. After a careful search, I shook my wife by the shoulder, to wake her up, that I might learn, if possible, what had become of the child. After some time, though evidently under the influence of liquor, I awakened this wretched woman, and made her understand me. She then made a sign, that it was in the bed. I proceeded to examine, and found the poor suffering babe beneath her. She had

pressed the life out of its little body.—It was quite dead.—It was but yesterday, that I put it into the ground. If you can credit it, this miserable mother was so intoxicated, that she could not follow it to the grave.—What can a poor man do, with such a burthen as this? The owner of the little tenement, in which I have lived, has given me notice to quit, because he says, and reasonably enough too, that the chance of my wife's setting it on fire is growing greater every day. However, I feel that within me, that promises a release before long, from all this insufferable misery. But what will become of my poor children!"—Johnny sat down upon a bench, and burst into tears.—His visitor, as we have said, was a kind-hearted man.—"Suppose I should get some discreet person to talk with your wife," said he.—Johnny raised his eyes and his hands, at the same moment. "Talk with her!" he replied, "you may as well talk with a whirlwind; the abuse, which she poured on me, this morning, for proposing to bring our good

minister to talk with her, would have made your hair stand on end. No, I am heart-broken, and undone, for this world. I have no hope, save in a better, through the mercies of God."—The visitor took the poor man by the hand, and silently departed. He uttered not a word; he was satisfied that nothing could be said to abate the domestic misery of poor Johnny Hodges in the present world; and there was something in his last words, and in the tone in which they were uttered, which assured the visitor, that Johnny's unshaken confidence in the promises of God would not be disappointed in another.

How entirely inadequate is the most finished delineation, to set forth, in true relief, the actual sum total of such misery as this! How little conception have all those painted male and female butterflies and moths, who stream along our public walks of a sunny morning, or flutter away their lives in our fashionable saloons;—how little conception have they of the real pressure of such prac-

tical wretchedness as this! To the interrogatory of poor Johnny Hodges, "*Can nothing be* DONE *to put an end to the evils of intemperance?*" what answer, here and hereafter, do those individuals propose to offer, who not only withhold their names from the temperance pledge, but who light up their castles; and call together the giddy and the gay of both sexes; and devote one apartment of their palaces, in the present condition of public sentiment, chastened and purified. as it is, to the *whisky punch bowl!*

The summer had passed, and the harvest was over. About four months after the last interview, I heard, for the first time, the story of poor Johnny Hodges. Taking upon my tablets a particular direction to his house and shop, I put on my surtout, and set forth, upon a clear, cold November morning, to pay the poor fellow a visit. It was not three miles from the city to his dwelling. By the special direction, which I had received, I readily identified the shop. The doors were closed,—for it was a sharp, frosty morning.

I wished to see the poor fellow at his forge, before I disclosed the object of my visit. I opened the door. He was not there. The bellows were still.—The last spark had gone out in the forge.—The hammer and tongs were thrown together.—Johnny's apron was lying carelessly upon the bench.—And the iron, upon which he had been working, lay cold upon the anvil.—I turned towards the little dwelling. That also had been abandoned. A short conversation with an elderly man, who proved to be a neighbor, soon put my doubts and uncertainties at rest. The conclusion of this painful little history may be told, in a very few words. The wife, who, it appears, notwithstanding her gross intemperance, retained no inconsiderable portion of personal comeliness, when not absolutely drunk; had run off, in company with a common soldier, abandoning her husband and children about three months before. Five days only before my visit, poor Johnny Hodges, having died of a broken heart, was committed to that peaceful grave, where the

wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest. On the same day, four little children were received, after the funeral, as inmates of the poor-house.

"I have known them well, all their life-long," said the old man, from whom I obtained the information. "The first four or five years of their married life, there was not a likelier, nor a thriftier, nor a happier couple, in the village. Hodges was at his forge early and late; and his wife was a pattern of neatness and industry. But the poor woman was just as much poisoned with rum, as ever a man was with arsenic. It changed her nature, until, at last, it rendered her a perfect nuisance. Every body speaks a kind word of poor Hodges; and every body says that his wife killed him, and brought his children to the poor-house. This is a terrible curse to be sure. Pray, sir, '*can't something be done to put an end to the evils of intemperance?*'"—Such, thought I, was the inquiry of poor Johnny Hodges. How long can the intelligent legislatures of our

country conscientiously permit this inquiry to pass, without a satisfactory reply? How many more wives shall be made the enemies of their own household; how many more children shall be made orphans; how many more temperate men shall be converted into drunken paupers; before the power of the law shall be exerted, to stay the plague! In the present condition of the world, while the legislature throws its fostering arm around this cruel occupation, how many there are, who will have abundant cause to exclaim, like poor Johnny Hodges, from the bottom of their souls,—WHAT A CURSE!—How many shall take as fair a departure for the voyage of life, and make shipwreck of all their earthly hopes, in a similar manner! How many hearts, not guilty of presumptuous sins, but grateful for Heaven's blessings in some humble sphere, shall be turned, by such misery as this, into broken cisterns, which can hold no earthly joy! How many husbands of drunken wives; how many wives of drunken hus-

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bands; how many miserable children, flying in terror from the walking corpses of inebriated parents, shall cry aloud, like poor Johnny Hodges, in the language of despair, WHAT A CURSE!

* I have learned, since the preparation of this tale, from the collector himself, that Hodges expressed the liveliest gratitude, for the doctor's kindness, in relinquishing his claim for professional services; but that he persisted in refusing to receive a five-dollar note, which accompanied the receipted bill;—"God will reward the doctor for all his kindness," said the poor fellow, "but I cannot take the money."